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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SOMALI FOREIGN MINISTER

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In a meeting with Somalia's Foreign Minister, the Ambassador warned that time is running out for genuine reconciliation. The US will not support a conference that does not offer political reconciliation. Without political reconciliation, clan war will resume. The TFG needs to keep us better informed. The Foreign Minister asked for patience saying that Somalis will talk through their problems. He believed that the reconciliation conference would begin on time and he broke down how the delegates would be distributed among the clans. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met with new Somali Foreign Minister Hussein Elabe Fahiye and Somali Ambassador to Kenya Mohamed Ali Nur (Americo) at his residence on May 24. Poloff attended as note taker.

¶3. (SBU) After quickly dispensing with opening pleasantries, the Ambassador noted that:

--TFG President Yusuf's meetings with the Hawiye/Ayr and other opposition sub-clans did not seem to be producing meaningful results;

--the National Reconciliation Congress (NRC) was hopelessly ill-prepared to begin June 14 as scheduled, except, perhaps for an opening ceremony; and,

--time is running out.

The Ambassador warned that the TFG had not won a decisive military victory in Mogadishu in April. Al Shabaab and other radicals were still in Somalia and were regrouping. They probably would be in a position to go on the offensive within a few months. The only hope Somalia had to avoid a protracted, bloody insurgency was a successful National Reconciliation Congress that produced real power sharing that will marginalize the radicals. To reassure the clans and sub-clans that the Congress will address political--not just social--reconciliation, the National Governance and Reconciliation Committee (NGRC) under Chairman Ali Mahdi Mohamed must immediately publish a Congress agenda unambiguously announcing that power sharing will be on the table.

¶4. (SBU) Foreign Minister Elabe assured the Ambassador that the TFG was committed to an all-inclusive Congress. He said that it would be difficult to represent all eight million Somalis but that the independent NGRC was working toward equitable clan representation based on the 4.5 power sharing formula, which was now all but sacred to Somalis.

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador advised the Foreign Minister that the United States would not contribute financing to an NRC that was not credible, that did not address the political grievances of the disaffected clans and sub-clans. He let Elabe know that sub-clan representatives, including the Ayr, are talking to us about events in Mogadishu, including their meetings with President Yusuf. "We won't be fooled," he stated.

¶6. (SBU) Ambassador Nur interjected his view that the Ayr were using the media to gain political advantage and that to cater to them would encourage other clans and sub-clans to engage in violence against the TFG.

¶7. (SBU) The Ambassador stated that various sub-clan representatives were keeping us informed and urged that the TFG do more to keep us informed of the state of play so that we can more effectively coordinate efforts. He emphasized that the Congress could not succeed without the support of the Hawiye sub-clans, who will also see the NRC as the last chance to salvage Somalia. He reminded both Elabe and Nur that the clan violence of March and April (fanned by radical Islamists) arose from a feeling of defensiveness when weapons confiscations began and from exclusion from genuine political power sharing. Islamic Courts radicals and terrorists seek to exploit clan violence in order to develop a full-blown insurgency. If the NRC did not redress the grievances, fighting would erupt again. The TFG must reach out to these disaffected sub-clans, not marginalize them.

¶8. (SBU) Foreign Minister Elabe stated that Somalia's problems used to be country-wide but that they were now confined essentially to Mogadishu. He reiterated that the

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NGRC was an independent body trying to assure that all clans and sub-clans were properly represented. He pleaded that the NRC be allowed to go forward without interference. He asked that we and the international community give the Congress a chance because Somalis will resolve their differences face-to-face as they have done for centuries.

¶9. (SBU) The Ambassador again stated that the NRC was Somalia's last chance to avoid an all-out conflict. He again urged the TFG to keep us informed, noting that we might be able to assist in pressing key sub-clans to be responsive to genuine TFG offers.

¶10. (SBU) Elabe indicated understanding and again pleaded for patience as the reconciliation process moves forward. He opined that the NRC would begin, at least nominally, on June 14 as scheduled and stated that it will be comprised of 1,325 delegates: 250 from each of the four major clans; 125 from the combined smaller clans; 100 from the diaspora (which will not be clan-based), and 100 in reserve to address potential delegate problems.

¶11. (SBU) Bio note. Elabe is a Dir/Gudabirse. He speaks fluent and intelligible English, and he attended Eastern Michigan University from 1960 to 1963. He appears to be in his late 60s, seems to be in reasonable health, and wears glasses.

Ranneberger